

NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5432
JOHN ALBERT

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"CHARTER 77" -- ONE YEAR LATER

ANNCR:

ONE YEAR AGO, A GROUP OF DETERMINED INTELLECTUALS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA PUBLISHED A DOCUMENT THEY CALLED "CHARTER 77." IN IT, THEY ASKED THEIR GOVERNMENT TO ADHERE TO THE PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN RIGHTS IT HAD OFFICIALLY ACCEPTED. TODAY, ONE YEAR LATER, DESPITE MANY MONTHS OF HARASSMENT, LOSS OF JOBS AND ARRESTS, VOA NEWS ANALYST JOHN ALBERT OBSERVES THAT THIS GROUP APPEARS TO BE LARGER AND MORE ACTIVE THAN IT WAS BEFORE.

VOICE:

THE CZECHOSLOVAK MANIFESTO, KNOWN AS "CHARTER 77," ORIGINALLY WAS SIGNED LAST JANUARY BY MORE THAN 300 WRITERS, JOURNALISTS, SCIENTISTS, PERSONS ACTIVE IN POLITICAL LIFE AND BY PLAIN CITIZENS. SINCE THEN MORE THAN 700 PEOPLE HAVE PUBLICLY IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES WITH THE DOCUMENT. A FEW WEEKS AFTER THE MANIFESTO APPEARED -- AND IN RESPONSE TO THE HARASSMENT OF ITS SIGNERS BY THE CZECHOSLOVAK AUTHORITIES -- THE STATE DEPARTMENT IN WASHINGTON COMMENTED THAT THE CHARTER IS NOT A DOCUMENT OF POLITICAL OPPOSITION. AT MOST, IT LISTS THE LAWS AND AGREEMENTS WHICH ALREADY BIND THE PRAGUE GOVERNMENT TO RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS AND TO TREAT ITS CITIZENS ACCORDINGLY. BUT THE CHARTER NOTES THAT MANY OF THESE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS EXIST IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA ONLY ON PAPER. THESE INCLUDE THE RIGHT TO HIGHER EDUCATION, WHICH THE CHARTER SAID IS DENIED TO MANY YOUNG PEOPLE BECAUSE OF THE VIEWS OF THEIR PARENTS. THE CHARTER ALSO CLAIMED THAT FREEDOM OF INFORMATION, OF SPEECH AND OF RELIGION ARE SEVERELY RESTRICTED. THE DAILY LIVES OF THE PEOPLE, IT ADDED, ARE CONTROLLED BY TELEPHONE TAPPING, THE SURVEILLANCE OF PRIVATE HOMES, THE MONITORING OF

MAIL, BY VARIOUS POLICES MEASURES, AND BY RESTRICTING THE RIGHT OF FREE TRAVEL.

THE SIGNERS OF THE CHARTER EMPHASIZED THAT IT WAS NOT INTENDED AS THE BASIS FOR OPPOSITION POLITICAL ACTIVITY, AND THAT IT DID NOT ASK FOR SOCIAL REFORM OR CHANGE. IT ASKED, THEY SAID, SOLELY FOR OBSERVANCE OF BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS, AS GUARANTEED BY THE CHARTER OF THE UNITED NATIONS, THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, AS WELL AS THE AGREEMENTS OF HELSINKI THEMSELVES, ALL OF WHICH THE CZECHOSLOVAK GOVERNMENT HAS SIGNED.

THE REACTION OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK GOVERNMENT WAS SWIFT AND REPRESSIVE. MANY SIGNERS WERE ARRESTED AND MORE LOST THEIR JOBS. WHILE OTHERS -- AMONG THEM HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGNER ZDENEK MYLNAR -- WERE FORCED INTO EMIGRATION. (OPT) PAVEL KOHOUT, A PLAYWRIGHT AND AUTHOR, WHO WAS AN EARLY SUPPORTER OF THE CHARTER, WAS EVICTED FROM HIS APARTMENT IN PRAGUE AND TRANSFERRED TO A PROVINCIAL TOWN. THE LEADING SPOKESMAN FOR "CHARTER 77," FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER JIRY HASEK, HAS BEEN LIVING UNDER VIRTUAL HOUSE ARREST SINCE LAST FEBRUARY. KOHOUT, LUDVIK, VACULIK, VACLAV HAVEL AND 13 OTHER WRITERS REPORTED IN DECEMBER THAT AN OFFICIAL BAN ON TRAVEL AND ON PUBLISHING HAS BEEN IMPOSED ON THEM FOR EIGHT YEARS. (END OPT) THE MOST SEVERE MEASURES WERE TAKEN AGAINST WRITER VACLAV HAVEL, JOURNALIST JIRI LEDERER AND PLAYWRIGHT FRANTISEK PAVLICEK, WHO WERE TRIED FOR "CRIMES AGAINST THE REPUBLIC," A PRETEXT FOR THEIR ADHERENCE TO THE CHARTER, AND SENTENCED TO VARIOUS PRISON TERMS.

THE TRIAL TOOK PLACE WHILE IN BELGRADE THE FOLLOW-UP CONFERENCE TO THE HELSINKI AGREEMENTS WAS REVIEWING COMPLIANCE WITH THOSE AGREEMENTS. (OPT) U.S. CHIEF DELEGATE ARTHUR GOLDBERG STRONGLY DENOUNCED THE ACTIONS OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK GOVERNMENT AND

NOTED THAT EVEN THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY NEWSPAPER "L'HUMANITE"
 WAS PREVENTED FROM SENDING A REPORTER TO THE TRIAL. (END OPT)

BUT DESPITE A YEAR-LONG DRIVE AGAINST THE "CHARTER 77"
 ADHERENTS, IN WHICH STRONG GOVERNMENT MEASURES ALTERNATED WITH A
 CERTAIN ACCEPTANCE OF THEIR EXISTENCE, THE MOVEMENT IS STILL VERY
 MUCH ALIVE. REPORTS NOW SAY IT INTENDS TO ISSUE A NEW CHARTER
 BECAUSE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THEIR COUNTRY HAVE NOT STOPPED.

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